Duke said, "as will Miss Hanley. Take him to Mrs Moore and ask her to give him something to eat and put him to bed."

"Very good, Your Grace," the butler said.

Luella looked down at Enrico. "I expect you are hungry," she said in Italian. "This gentleman will give you some food, and then find a nice bedroom in which to sleep. I will come to see you as soon as you are in bed."

"Try not forget," Enrico begged.

Luella smiled: "No, of course not, but first they will find you something delicious for supper."

The small boy's dark eyes lit up at this. When the butler held out his hand he put his into it. As if he understood what he must do he said in English: " 'Rico . . verry . . hungr.y. Have . . pain . . in . . tummy."

"Come along then," Bates said, "and I will find you something which will take away the pain and which you will enjoy."

They went from the room and Luella turned towards the Duke. He was standing by the fireplace. As she walked towards him he seemed to be watching her somewhat suspiciously. Because she was still frightened, she said as she reached him: "I am sorry . . I am very . . sorry that . . this has . . happened,"

"You really had no idea what Vecchio was up to?" the Duke asked.

"Certainly not!" Luella replied. "I saw no reason to . . disbelieve him and, to be . . honest, I was . . nervous of travelling . . alone to England without . . somebody with . . me."

"I can understand that," the Duke replied. "Now,

suppose you sit down and start this story from the beginning."

Luella moved to the sofa which faced the fireplace and sat in a corner of it. Because she was still nervous she sat on the edge of the seat and locked her fingers together in her lap.

"You tell me you have no idea what this letter contains," the Duke began, "so I suggest you read it." He held it out to her and Luella took it reluctantly. She had a feeling that the Duke still suspected that she was part of the plot against him. She was afraid that anything she said would involve her more deeply than she was at the moment.

The letter was written in a scholarly hand on expensive white writing-paper. She read:

Your Grace,

This comes to you with your son, who has nowhere to go now that his mother, Tia, is dead and was buried two days ago.

He was born on the 21st February 1875 almost nine months after you left Milan. When you and Tia separated and there was no communication between you, she brought Enrico up at her own expense.

In the years that she has been alone she has incurred some very large debts. These amount, in English money, to approximately half a million pounds.

I shall expect to hear from you concerning them.

I remain,

Yours truly,

Vittorio Vecchio.